



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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STATE WILDLIFE OFFICIALS DECRY WOLF DECISION

Montana wildlife officials decried today's federal court decision that placed the recovered Rocky Mountain gray wolf back on to the federal list of threatened and endangered species.

"We believe we made arguments to the judge that he could have relied on to uphold the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to delist the wolf," said Joe Maurier, director of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. "We will carefully examine the ruling to determine what options remain open to Montana's wildlife managers."

While today's decision by Federal District Judge Donald W. Molloy in Missoula takes away state management of the wolf, the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission officially asked FWP to immediately appeal the ruling to the 9th Circuit Court and to aggressively seek management options with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"If we understand the ruling correctly, Judge Molloy is telling the federal government that because Wyoming still doesn't have adequate regulatory mechanisms to manage wolves, you can't delist the wolf in Montana and Idaho," Maurier said. "We simply can't manage wildlife successfully in that environment. We must have the ability to manage wildlife, to do our job, to seek a balance among predator and prey. As a practical matter, as wildlife managers, we need the authority to respond to the challenges wolves present every day."

Today's federal court decision reinstates Endangered Species Act protection for wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains, with federal law guiding Montana's wolf management options. With today's ruling, a general wolf hunting season in Montana is prohibited.

Wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains were removed from federal protection in March 2009, a decision that was almost immediately challenged by a coalition of 13 groups seeking to put wolves back on the endangered species list.

The recovery of the wolf in the northern Rockies is one of the fastest endangered species comebacks on record. In the mid 1990s, to hasten the overall pace of wolf recovery in the Northern Rockies, more than 60 wolves were released into Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho.

The minimum recovery goal for wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains was set at a minimum of 30 breeding pairs—successfully reproducing wolf packs—and a minimum of 300 individual wolves for at least three consecutive years. This goal was achieved in 2002, and the wolf population has increased every year since.

The wolf population in the Northern Rocky Mountain Recovery Area, which comprises parts of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, was estimated to be at least 1,706, with 242 packs, and 115 breeding pairs at the end of last year. About 525 wolves were estimated to inhabit Montana, in 100 packs and 34 breeding pairs.

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